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ABSTRACT

Examined in this paper is the impact two shifts in the civil rights movement had upon racial attitudes: (1) the shift from the South to the rest of the nation, and (2) the shift from issues of freedom to those of equality. It is noted that as long as the civil rights movement remained principally in the South, Northern whites were real, if somewhat reluctant, allies of blacks. It is also noted that when Northerners began to see the civil rights movement as a threat, they drew upon their past experiences to interpret what was happening. Part of this experience helped to create anti-black feelings, and a belief in laissez-faire doctrines of government and traditional values. A number of studies are cited to illustrate the contention that the change from old-fashioned racism (segregation-integration issues and black stereotypes) to the new symbolic racism has not changed the basic racist attitudes of upper middle class whites. (Author/EB)

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SYMBOLIC RACISM IN AMERICA

The Issues are Different, But the Feeling Lingers On[1]

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On this lovely Sunday morning most of you are probably too hungover to note that the title of this paper is somewhat different from the one in the Convention Program. For those of you who did notice the difference, I can only say that though you didn't have as much fun last night as the rest of us, you will get your reward in heaven. For those of you who did not notice, what can I say?[2]

That concludes this morning's sermon.

In this paper I want to examine the impact of the shift of the civil rights movement from South to nationwide and from issues of freedom to those of equality upon racial attitudes as expressed in public opinion polls and in upper middle class living rooms.

As everyone who has taken introductory social or political psychology knows, an attitude is a learned predisposition to respond evaluatively toward an object in the social, physical or psychological environment. An attitude is generally thought to have three dimensions (Oskamp, 1977). These are the affective or feeling dimension, the cognitive or belief dimension and the connative or behaviorial intention or policy preference dimension. These dimensions are correlated usually, but they do not have to be on theoretical grounds (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Oskamp, 1977) and the extent to which the dimensions of attitudes toward a specific attitude object are correlated is an empirical question in any population.

This conceptualization of attitudes is central to the analysis that

follows because the events of the past, what Brewster Smith (1968) has termed "the distal social antecedents," affect current political behavior in two ways. First, past events shape the political, racial, and value socialization (the attitudes) of current political actors (both leaders and nonleaders); and, second, the past feeds into the on-going stream of events creating the contemporary political and racial context. Since time is short and history is long, we shall turn immediately to an examination of these two paths to current political and ~~radical~~ racial behavior.

History:

The civil rights movement began slowly in the South, but as it gained momentum there Northern whites started to pay more attention to blacks and the issues associated with civil rights (Johnson, Sear, and McConahay, 1971; Sheatsley, 1966; Taylor, Sheatsley & Greeley, 1978). In order to understand the reactions of Northern whites, we note two important characteristics of the civil rights struggle which began with the Montgomery boycott and continued through the battles of Birmingham and Selma.

First, the problem was visible and well defined and second, there was a visible enemy who openly espoused what I and others call old fashioned racism. The problem was de jure segregation of public schools and other public facilities and a denial of the right to vote by legal chicanery. Signs proclaimed it from every restroom, restaurant, and movie theatre. Furthermore, the conflicting parties and even casual observers could spot one another. Blacks stood eyeball to eyeball with Bull Connor, Jim Clark, and George Wallace, while Northern whites looked on from time to time through the media. For Northern whites, it was easy to spot the racism of Connor, et.al., because it was open, old fashioned prejudice. Northern whites knew that once the laws were changed to give blacks their freedom to

eat, shop, and study where they could afford to, then the problem was one of changing individuals, a problem which accorded well with American Civil Protestantism (Bellah 1967).[3] Just as each individual had to work out his or her own religious salvation, each black would have to work his or her way ahead in the system and each Southern bigot would have to come to grips with his or her own racism.

As long as the civil rights movement remained principally in the South, the nature of the problem and of the conflicting parties made Northern whites real, if somewhat reluctant, allies of blacks for at least three reasons. First, as is always the case when a conflict is at a distance, the issues were moral and the blacks were clearly and unambiguously upon the side of justice. Blacks were seeking their freedom (as opposed to an equal opportunity) to compete in the quest for the American dream. This accorded well with the Protestant Ethic with its emphasis upon individuals' working hard to attain earthly evidence of individual success in the race for salvation. A desire to compete in this manner could only indicate the righteousness of the cause. Second, the laws passed by Northern Congressmen in response to the pressures of the civil rights movement were all aimed at imposing reforms upon the South. It is always easier to be for reform when it will not inconvenience you or take away your power than it is when you must make the sacrifices. Third, and finally, the non-violent attack upon de jure segregation and individual racism not only did not inconvenience Northerners, it did not threaten any of the basic institutions, values, systems, or prerogatives of Northern society. To allow someone to eat in a restaurant was good for business. It did not mean that someone else could not have a meal. Hence, as the various polls reviewed by Erskine (1967) revealed, Northerners gave strong support to specific reforms and to specific protests even though they were not too happy with the protests in general.

When the press of events shifted the locus of civil rights activity to the North in 1964-65, the nature of the conflict was radically altered. The problem was no longer a well-defined de jure segregation; it was a diffuse de facto racism. The need was no longer for freedom to compete and enjoy. Northern blacks had possessed that freedom for years. It was now an equal opportunity which blacks sought to obtain. The reforms needed were not specific and limited. Rather, they threatened every Northern institution. But the most profound differences were in the nature of the antagonists. Here the conflict was between a different kind of black (Sears & McConahay, 1973) and a different kind of white.

The blacks in the North started legally, sociologically, and psychologically from a point that Southern blacks were just striving for, and they pressed their demands for programs aimed at doing away with de facto segregation and discrimination by means of an almost unbelievably wide range of tactics including violence (or the threat of violence) as well as by more conventional means (Sears & McConahay, 1973). Their white opponents were not Southern bigots, but Northerners who were relatively lacking in Old-Fashioned racism and preoccupied with their own privatistic lifestyles (Sears & McConahay, 1973).

Suddenly, these Northern whites found that the "Negro problem" was not confined to the South, but was close to home and they were forced to look out from their private lives at the public events swirling around them. When they did this, they drew upon their past socialization to interpret what was happening. My research suggests that three aspects of their socialization is important for understanding the reactions of these Northern whites: anti-black affect, lassez-faire doctrines of government, and traditional values.

White Socialization:

Racial attitudes are among the earliest attitudes acquired by the

individual (perhaps as early as five or six years of age) and are relatively stable throughout the individual's lifetime (Sears, 1969; Sears & McConahay, 1973). Furthermore, these attitudes correlate highly with parental attitudes (not with contact with blacks or other minorities) and are acquired at the affective level before they are articulated at the verbal or cognitive level (Ehrlich, 1973; Horowitz, 1936; Katz, 1975). And, virtually every systematic study of regional differences in anti-black prejudice has shown that Northern whites were less prejudiced than Southern whites (Campbell, 1971; Sears, 1969; Sheatsley, 1966; Erskine, 1967; Middleton, 1976). This does not mean that Northern whites were free of racism or prejudice, only that their prejudice was less than that of Southerners and that it was less obvious.

During most of this century, the majority of Northern, suburban whites have been too preoccupied with their own lives to give much thought to blacks (Sears & McConahay, 1973). In addition, blacks received little coverage in the press except when they rioted during World War I and II and in the mid to late 1960's (Johnson, Sears & McConahay, 1971). With a few minor exceptions, the major public opinion organizations did not think black issues were of sufficient general importance to ask people questions about them until the start of the direct action period of the civil rights movement in 1954 (Sheatsley, 1966). As a consequence, Northern whites never had to confront their racial feelings. Thus, because affluent and educated Northerners were especially less likely than Southerners to espouse old fashioned prejudice, these suburbanites perceived that the North did not have a race problem.

Feeding into these perceptions was the fact that most efforts by social reformers to combat prejudice in this century concentrated on the most blatant anti-black attitudes and behaviors rather than upon the affective components. (And rightly so. It was, after all, more important to prevent

whites from lynching and abusing blacks than to get whites to feel good about blacks or to love them.) Perhaps as a consequence of these reform efforts, old fashioned racism declined in both the North and South, but the best evidence available indicates that for persons socialized between 1930 and 1960 (the developmental period for most current adult voters), anti-black affect or feeling has not declined at all in recent years (Campbell, 1971), or that it has not declined at the same rate as expressions of old fashioned racism (Sigall & Page, 1971). As a result, many Northern white adults at the present time do not (or will not) express old fashioned racism while they still harbor a great residue of unacknowledged anti-black affect.

The other residues of socialization affecting Northern whites' reaction to the shift in locus of civil rights issues and activities were two dimensions of conservatism: laissez-faire doctrines of government and traditional values (McConahay & Hough, 1976). We do not know as much about the socialization of these abstract values as we do about racial socialization. They certainly are not acquired as early or as universally as party identification and some people do not acquire them in any systematic fashion at all (Converse, 1975). Also, it should be emphasized that, in the abstract, these are not tainted at all with racism. Nevertheless, to the extent that these whites opposed all but the most minimal government intervention in "private" affairs and endorsed the values derived from secularized versions of the Protestant Ethic (hard work, individualism, sexual repression and delay of gratification), they were angered by the blacks' tactics and they viewed the blacks' demands for hiring, educational and housing quotas, recognition and respect, and an end to all aspects of <u>de facto</u> segregation and discrimination as immoral. Furthermore, the more traditional and conservative these whites were and the more negative were their feelings

toward blacks, the more likely they were to express their anger and moral outrage in symbolic opinions (to pollsters and researchers) and in symbolic behaviors, especially that most symbolic of American political behavior, the vote. In short, a new form of racism, symbolic racism, was born.

Symbolic Racism:

The most concise definition of what David Sears, Don Kinder and I have called symbolic racism is "the expression in terms of abstract, ideological symbols and symbolic behaviors of the feeling that blacks are violating cherished values and making illegitimate demands for changes in the racial status quo." (McConahay & Hough, 1976, p. 38). Symbolic racism is contrasted with old fashioned racism which is concerned with issues of segregation-integration and with the old stereotypes of blacks i.e. that they are dumb, lazy, musical and shiftless (whatever that means).

Both old fashioned and symbolic racism are part of the cognitive and connative dimensions of attitudes toward blacks. The distinction between the two will be perhaps more clear if we examine the items used to operationalize them in a recent study. Tables 1 and 2 give the items and reliabilities for scales of symbolic and old fashioned racism from a random sample survey of c 770 whites in Jefferson County (Louisville) Kentucky in 1976. [Read items from Tables 1 and 2 at this point]

The central thesis of this paper is that while the number of persons endorsing the old fashioned items has declined over the years (Sheatsley, 1966; Sigall & Page, 1971; Taylor, Greeley & Sheatsley, 1978), this represents a change only on the cognitive and connative dimensions. Anti-black affect (North and South) has declined very little (or at a much slower rate), so that when the locus of activity and the issues changed, this affect could be displaced upon a new set of items i.e. a new set of symbols of expression. These are the items (but not all) shown in Table 1,

the symbolic racism items.

Why it is Racism:

The cognitive dimension items for symbolic racism shown in Table 1 and those issues that form the connative dimension (opposition to busing, opposition to affirmative action in hiring, promotions, and educational admissions) can be endorsed for non-racial, philosophical reasons. Indeed, old liberals of the The Public Interest stripe claim that (or rationalize) their positions on libertarian and traditional values grounds. And countless news media reporters and academic colleagues have asked me "Is it really racism to hold those positions?"

I think the answer is "Yes, it really is racism" and in the next few minutes I want to sketch out why I think so.

First, these items (or similar ones) distinguish between voters for Sam Yorty, the unpopular white mayor, and Tom Bradley, the black city councilman, in the 1969 and 1973 Los Angeles mayoral elections (Sears & Kinder, 1971: McConahay & Hough, 1976). Elsewhere, I have argued (successfully) that race was the major issue in those elections (McConahay & Hough, 1976).

Second, in two studies, measures of anti-black affect were correlated with symbolic racism. In the first, anti-black affect accounted for the most variance in a regression equation that included measures of libertarian and traditional values (McConahay & Hough, 1976). In the second, (McConahay & Hawley, 1977), a factor analysis found that the affect measure loaded above .5 on both the symbolic racism and the old fashioned racism factors which had separate items otherwise loading above .5 on them (see Tables 1 and 2 for the items).

Third, in an experimental study conducted at Duke University in the spring of 1978 by Betty Hardee, Valerie Batts and myself, the race of the

experimenter affected scores on the old fashioned racism scale but not on the symbolic racism scale. And, errors in distance perception were related to both symbolic racism ($r=.62$ $p<.04$) and old fashioned racism ($r=.68$ $p<.02$) when approaching the black E, but correlations between racism scores and perceptual errors were zero when approaching the white E.

Because this last study is unpublished (as yet), I want to give a few details. White, male Duke undergraduates enrolled in introductory psychology arrived one at a time at the lab where they were met by either a black or white female Experimenter (randomly assigned). The women were about the same age and somatype. The E handed the Ss a questionnaire which had a number of social and political attitude items on it plus the I-E scale and the Eysenck Personality Inventory. Imbedded in this instrument were the symbolic and old fashioned racism items of Tables 1 and 2. On all five of the old fashioned items, the Ss scored less racist (significantly so for four items) when the E was black. On the symbolic racism items and all of the other items (but one), race of the E had no effect. After collecting the questionnaires, the E instructed the Ss to stand behind a line and then walk toward a target on a chair some 14 feet away. The target, randomly counterbalanced, was either a box or the E herself. At predetermined points along the way, the Ss were asked to estimate (in feet and inches) how far they were from the target. As indicated above, both racism scales predicted errors in distance perception when the target was the black E, but not when she was the white E (or when the target was a box).

Two points clearly emerge from this study. First people (or at least Duke students) see the racial relevance of the old fashioned items, but do not have the same perception of the symbolic items, i.e. the symbolic racism items are nonreactive. Second, both types of racism predict behavior when race is relevant. In that sense they are functionally equivalent.

So, symbolic racism is related to anti-black feeling and it predicts racially relevant behavior whether it is voting or spatial distance judging.

It was also the strongest predictor of opposition to busing in Louisville (McConahay & Hawley, 1977), but then it should have been because opposition to busing is part of the connative dimension of symbolic racism.

Conclusion:

When the struggle for civil rights shifted from the South to nationwide and the changes demanded shifted from freedom related to equal opportunity related, whites outside of the South were caught by surprise. Especially surprised and offended were the upper middle class whites who had been (some of them anyway) the long distance allies of the blacks in the South. These whites had learned that racism was keeping blacks out of lunchrooms and holding negative stereotypes. Since they did not think these things (or would not say them in public), they perceived themselves to be free of racism. But emotionally they still harbored feelings acquired in childhood and the new steps needed (or demanded) to purge America's legacy of racism offended their values as well. So, that legacy is going to be with us for a while longer.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Paper delivered to the American Political Science Association Convention, Sunday Morning, September 3, 1978, New York, New York. Work on this paper was partially supported by a grant from the Ford Foundation to Duke University and by a Duke University Research Council Grant. John B. McConahay was the principal investigator on both grants.

[2]I made up the title in the program in 15 minutes on a busy afternoon last fall and when I sat down to write the paper seven months later, I decided that that was not the paper I wanted to write.

[3]This is not to imply that only Protestants hold Protestant values or adhere to the Protestant Ethic. In research I have done in Claremont, California (McConahay & Hough, 1976) and Louisville, Kentucky (McConahay & Hawley, 1977) it was found that persons socialized as Protestants differed significantly from Roman Catholics on a scale of Conventional Protestant Religious Beliefs. However, the general pattern was for Catholics to score more traditional or conventional than Protestants. Since these values are usually thought of as being secularized versions of the values of the Protestant Ethic (Weber, 1958), this finding might appear somewhat surprising except for the fact that among the most ardent supporters of Protestant individualism in recent history have been Roman Catholics Joseph MacCarthy, Bishop Fulton Sheen and the brothers Buckley.

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Table 1

Items and Reliabilities for the Symbolic Racism Scale

(Whites Only)

Item	Correlation[a]
Over the past few years the government and news media have shown more respect to blacks than they deserve. (Strongly Disagree=1, Strongly Agree=5)	.56
Over the past few years blacks have gotten more economically than they deserve. (Strongly Disagree=1, Strongly Agree=5)	.51
Blacks are getting too demanding in their push for equal rights. (Strongly Disagree=1, Strongly Agree=5)	.47
It is easy to understand the anger of black people in America (Strongly Disagree=5, Strongly Agree=1)	.34
Perceived Influence of Blacks upon school desegregation decisions (Too Little= -4, Too Much=+4)	.32

N	775
$\bar{X}$	18.07
S.D.	5.77
Alpha	.66

[a]The correlations in this column are between the given item and the sum of the other items in the scale.

Table 2

Items and Reliabilities for the Old Fashioned Racism Scale
(Whites Only)

Item	Correlation[a]
Generally speaking, do you favor full racial integration, integration in some areas of life, or separation of the races? (Full Integration = 1, Separation = 3)	.55
If a black family with about the same income and education as you moved next door, would you mind it a lot, a little or not at all? (Not Mind at all = 1, Mind a Lot = 4)	.52
How strongly would you object if a member of your family had a close friendship with a black -- strongly, somewhat, slightly, or not at all? (Not at All = 1, Strongly = 4)	.51
How do you feel about the open housing law in Louisville/Jefferson County which allows more racial integration of neighborhoods? Do you strongly favor, somewhat favor, somewhat oppose or strongly oppose this law? (Strongly Favor = 1, Strongly Oppose = 5)	.50
Generally do you feel blacks are smarter, not as smart or about as smart as whites? (Blacks Smarter = 1, Whites Smarter = 3)	.31

N	770
$\bar{X}$	12.48
S.D.	3.94
Alpha	.66

[a]The correlations in this column are between the given item and the sum of the other items in the scale.